

RACISM AND CULTURAL DIVERSITY IN THE MASS MEDIA

An overview of research and
examples of good practice
in the EU Member States, 1995-2000

on behalf of the

European Monitoring Centre
on Racism and Xenophobia, Vienna
(EUMC)

by

European Research Centre
on Migration and Ethnic Relations
(ERCOMER)

Edited by Jessika ter Wal

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PREFACE

The research interest in analysing the way mass media report on ethnic issues has increased in the Member States over the last decades. And for this reason the EUMC decided to bring together the major research reports and their findings over the last five years in this report "RACISM AND CULTURAL DIVERSITY IN THE MASS MEDIA - an overview of research and examples of good practice in the EU Member States, 1995-2000".

The project has been carried out by Dr Jessika ter Wal, at Ercomer, Utrecht University, the Netherlands. I would like to express my sincere gratitude to her for her excellent work. The report underlines the importance of media research in the area of racism and diversity.

The mass media, and especially the news media, have an unequivocal position in society when it comes to establishing and disseminating common cultural references. The mass media have an influence on people's attitudes as well as our common knowledge, but not always in the expected and desired ways.

The active democratic role of the mass media in society can be influenced by a number of factors. The way the mass media represent, focus and give voice to different actors and incidents in society could have the unintentional result of strengthening a racist discourse instead of fighting against it. Mass media reporting is especially sensitive when it comes to ethnic, cultural and religious relations in our society.

The mass media organisations in the Member States take different initiatives to promote cultural, ethnic and religious diversity, such as developing codes of conduct, recruiting broadcasters from the migrant and minority communities and training the personnel from multiethnic societies.

The report has already attracted a lot of interest from researchers, from journalists as well as from media organisations. I hope that the report will be of practical use to all those interested in the fight against racism and especially those working in the media.

Beate Winkler

Director of the EUMC

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4.14 SWEDEN (SV)

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General trends in news reporting on questions related to immigration, racism and cultural diversity seem to pull in two different directions. In recent years, the news has focused more on conflicts and problems than previously. Further, 'immigrants' are more often singled out as criminals and are the subjects of aggressive stereotyping in some of the news media. On the other hand, there are pronounced goals in large media enterprises to integrate persons with immigrant backgrounds within news on different social matters and to adapt publications to a multicultural society. It is too early to measure the results of these efforts with any precision. News reporting in mainstream media is mostly indifferent to the widespread problems of discrimination and racist harassment, although activities from neo-Nazi groups have been covered more regularly during 1999-2000.

4.14.1 GENERAL FINDINGS ON NEWS COVERAGE

4.14.1.1 News about immigrants and refugees

Over the last five years there has been little quantitative research in Sweden concerning the ways in which themes related to refugees, immigrants, racism and xenophobia have been presented in the media. There are though two exceptions, based on the same media source, *Rapport*, the major daily news-programme with the largest audience in public service television and based on the same method; systematic content analysis of news items.

Issues covered in *Rapport*, are likely to appear on the front pages of the leading daily newspapers, so the results from the studies may indicate some general trends:

- Issues in *Rapport* related to immigrants, xenophobia, and so

forth, ranked among the top five most important social questions covered by *Rapport* over the period 1979-1998 (Asp 1998). The more reports on immigration issues, the more negative and problematizing the news. Over 50 per cent of the total news output related to immigrants and racism in 1979-1998, covered news on refugees.

- The amount of news items related to immigrants and immigration had a peak during the first years of the 1990s. In the three years 1990-1992, analysis shows that news on ethnic issues, immigrant and refugee questions doubled, due to an increase in the amount of news on racism. During three winter months 1991/1992, the number of news items on racism and anti-racism formed an almost dominant theme in the news broadcasts. (Löwander, 1997). Löwander suggests that it would seem as if there was a co-ordinated and intentional prioritising of the news, with a degree of restraint with regard to negative reporting on immigrants during a period when immigrants and refugees were the target for racial violence.

There may be several different explanations why problematising and conflict-laden news became more common during the 1990s than in earlier years. One explanation concerns a general development in news journalism towards fixed schemata for news stories, where stories that centre on a distinct and simple conflict are preferred. A comparative study of journalistic news texts from 1976 and 1993 respectively shows a tendency towards purity and simplicity in the way journalistic texts about refugee and migration matters are constructed (Brune, 1998a). This means that news about the arrival of refugees, (or 'asylum-seekers' as they were usually called in the last decade) is associated exclusively with technical concerns and worries expressed by the police, the immigration authorities, and the government. Members of the general public, who wish to learn about the experiences of refugees from the media, have this opportunity only when individual immigrants, usually young women, face deportation. The news texts about the girl or 'plagued' woman operate in a genre that is especially popular in the tabloids and lighter television newscasts, a genre where solidarity and pity are provoked in a routinised way. The strict division

between news genres, however, does not allow for a critical in-depth investigation into immigration politics and policies in general. Rather, the media construct the issue in terms of a foreign 'invasion' by undesirable, while simultaneously pushing for the humanitarian treatment of a randomly selected few.

Another explanation for the more problematising and conflict oriented bent of news journalism rests upon the interplay between the media and a presumed or real public opinion. The media are supposed to be both influenced by negative opinions against immigration and immigrants, and influential in shaping those opinions (Brune, 1998a). It is assumed that the media are especially aware of messages from politicians and other representatives of the power elite, and that those messages in mediated and popularised forms are likely to affect the public. The study by Asp (1998) mentioned earlier indicates a correlation (not to be understood in simple cause-and-effect terms, however) between the amount of news items referring to refugees in *Rapport*, and the willingness on the part of the population to admit asylum-seekers into the country. When issues surrounding refugee immigration are intensely scrutinised in the news, public opinion tends to support stronger restrictions; but in periods when the issues receive less news attention a larger proportion of the population is willing to receive more refugees.

A third explanation refers to societal problems experienced over the last decade, including higher unemployment rates among immigrants, an expensive apparatus for receiving and integrating refugees, different signs of ethnic conflicts, growing racist violence (Löwander, 1997, Asp, 1998). This explanation could be considered incomplete, since it ignores the active roles that the news media and authorities play in defining immigration and refugees as 'problematic', and in shaping people's apprehensions and perceptions of those 'problems' (Brune, 1998a).

4.14.1.2 DO IMMIGRANTS APPEAR AS CITIZENS IN THE MEDIA?

A quantitative study limited to the output of news in mainstream media¹¹⁵ during one week in 1997 (1.510 news items), confirms

that 'ethnic Swedes', or, more accurately, persons with common Swedish surnames, are overrepresented among those who give their opinions in the news media (Helenius, 1998). Merely 8 per cent of those interviewed in the media during the period had names suggesting that they might be immigrants¹¹⁶. Only in subject fields directly related to immigration, racism and xenophobia - slightly more than one per cent of the news items during the period - were persons with non-Swedish sounding surnames represented as sources to the extent that corresponds to their proportion of the population (15-20 per cent). However, there are serious methodological problems connected with this overview. Exactly how does one decide whether the person featured in an article or news broadcast on television is an immigrant or not? In this case the researcher used the surnames of the persons who appeared in the news as indicators of their origin, a criterion that leaves room for many mistakes.¹¹⁷

Despite these shortcomings, the study confirms findings in earlier studies and what is known about 'media logic' in Western Europe (Löwander 1997; Brune 1996a; Hartmann and Husband, 1974; Hedman, 1985; van Dijk, 1991). Moreover, reporters' proclivity to depend upon sources representing the power elite - which primarily consists of people with a 'Swedish' style or Swedish-sounding names - seems to be as strong as ever.

4.14.1.3 ISLAM IN THE NEWS

One more overview, which concerns the representation of immigrants, should be mentioned. Although the issue of this study is Swedish news coverage concerning Islam in international as well as national news, the way the news media depict Islam and Muslim countries is relevant in this context. The international news probably has an impact both on the focus in national news on immigrants

115 Aftonbladet, Aktuellt (Sveriges Television), Dagens Nyheter, Expressen, Dagens Ekos middagssändning, Nyheterna (TV 4), Rapport (TV 2), Svenska Dagbladet, Sydsvenska Dagbladet.

116 Foreign news articles were excluded from the study as well as spokespersons from foreign countries.

117 Persons who have recently immigrated may for different reasons have 'Swedish-sounding' surnames. On the other hand, persons whose ancestors settled in the country generations ago may have 'foreign-sounding' names.

from Muslim countries and on the opinions in the general public regarding Muslim immigrants and the presence of Islam in the country.

A study on the Swedish news coverage about Islam broadcast by the three top news programmes from 1991-1995 shows that Islam was frequently portrayed as an extremely violent religion, with 85 per cent of all related news items focusing (either partially or fully), on violence (Hvitfelt, 1998). The most common theme during that period was war (39 per cent of the news items), and especially the wars in former Yugoslavia, where Muslims were also depicted as victims. The second most frequent motif was terrorism; every fourth news item was about extremist violence, which was associated with Islam or Muslim groups. The characterisation of Islam as a fanatic religion was further buttressed by the fact that the third most recurring theme was 'persecution of infidels', where the agents of the persecution were often portrayed as representatives of Islam, rather than as members of extremist minority groups.

Islam is a religion about which most Swedes have little knowledge and no personal experience. According to Hvitfelt, the general attitudes towards Islam can be expected to result from traditional conceptions conveyed in school, church, popular culture, and above all, in the mass media's coverage of events connected with Islam. According to opinion polls taken in 1993 and 1997, Swedish attitudes towards Islam are negative, to say the least. While only two per cent of those surveyed were portrayed either fairly or very positive towards Islam, 65 per cent were either fairly or very negative. Although a vast majority of the Swedes support freedom of religion, nearly half the population in 1997 held the opinion that Muslims should not be allowed to build mosques in Sweden.

Hvitfelt has also studied how non-Muslim Swedes received central Islamic symbols. Partly as a result of TV news portrayal of Islam, Islamic symbols have acquired a distinctly negative connotation also capable of arousing aggressive reactions in the general public. These 'spontaneous' negative reactions to Islamic symbols from the public are also an obstacle to the possible impact of impartial news reporting, as the content of positive or neutral news might be over-

shadowed by or filtered through the audiences' strongly negative preconceptions. Hvitfelt concludes that these prevalent attitudes towards Islam and (probably) Muslims result from xenophobia that is fuelled and legitimised by a constant stream of negative media pictures.

4.14.1.4 WORDING, STEREOTYPING AND RECURRENT THEMES IN NEWS ON IMMIGRATION¹¹⁸

The word '*invandrare*', (which is both the singular and plural form for immigrant[s]), was introduced in public life at the end of the 1960s and originally denoted persons who were themselves immigrants, as well as individuals with one or two immigrant parents. Over time the term has come to connote 'otherness' in everyday language, whereby '*invandrare*' are contrasted negatively to 'Swedes'. This is also the case in the news media. '*Invandrare*' are usually presented as problemised collectives in news texts where Swedish authorities define the problems and how they are going to solve them. The concept '*invandrare*' fluctuates between its statistical meaning, where '*invandrare*' make up about 11 per cent of the population (if the Swedish-born children of immigrants are not included) and its connotative meaning, where '*invandrare*' equals 'different' and (ultimately) 'problem'. In other words, when immigrants are presented in the media, they are referred to as '*invandrare*' mainly when they are considered problematic and/or different.

An analysis of the ways immigrant children were portrayed between 1993 and 1998 in the largest morning-paper (*Dagens Nyheter*), and - at that time - the largest tabloid (*Expressen*) reveals a fixed pattern of reporting. 'Immigrant girls' were often depicted as victims of tradition and of 'clashes' between incompatible cultures, whereas boys were seen as victims of social exclusion and as potential (or actual) criminals (Polite, 1998).

118 The following discussion is based on research and media studies using a mainly qualitative approach

These findings are partly confirmed in a systematic study of the news on 'immigrant youth' in four daily newspapers during six months of 1998 (Johansson, Löfving, Vaagenes, 1998). The researchers found that young persons with immigrant backgrounds rarely appeared in the media, but when they did, it was usually in a negative context. A recurrent theme was crime; the press either focused on crime committed by young men or on the position of young women as victims of crime. The study also shows that Swedish authorities are the main actors in articles about public life (crime, education, and so on) while the described young persons were usually allowed only to speak about their private lives.

The 'immigrant woman' is also a common stereotype in Swedish news media, aptly demonstrated in an investigation of the output of three large nation-wide newspapers during 1997-1998 (Berggren and Lindblad, 1998). Again, violence against women figured largely in the stories, usually perpetrated by male family members: fathers, brothers, or husbands. The 'immigrant woman' is likewise cast frequently as a victim of her own cultural tradition or religion, or of discrimination within the wider society. Paradoxically, the 'victim' is only one of two competing stereotypes regarding these women; the other is the 'strong, active' woman. The latter is portrayed enthusiastically as an exceptional person, who, against all odds, has succeeded in creating her own life and identity (i.e. has overcome the burdens of her background in order to become 'modern'). However, the underlying assumption of both portraits is the 'immigrant woman' as a victim.

In addition, the study points out that the victimised woman is often described as a Muslim and as a person with a static ethnic and cultural identity; she is defined as an immigrant as well as in terms of her tradition, religion, gender, etcetera. In an analysis of news texts about immigrants from the Middle East area it is asserted that media portrayals of 'immigrant women' as victims is a fixed genre at least since the 1970s (Brune, 2000). Moreover, the construction of the texts does not allow the women to interpret and define their own situation. Their bodies and clothes are described in detail and thereafter the women are characterised by their lack of rights, freedom, pleasures and knowledge. In other words, they are defined

negatively from what they are assumed to lack in contrast to an idealised conception of Swedish women as free, equal, and sexually emancipated. The women are further described, not as agents of their own destiny, but as passive dupes of their culture or of the men in their community.

On different occasions during the last five years, the news media have likewise been active in constructing an analogous stereotype of the 'Middle East' or 'Muslim' man, evoked mainly in connection with violence against women. The 'Middle East' or 'Muslim' man, like his female counterpart, is described as a dupe of tradition and religion, but in his case the latter is blamed for encouraging and legitimating violence against women. Furthermore, he is portrayed as unable to control his sexual as well as his violent impulses towards women, especially if he finds them provocative or defiant. Accordingly, he purportedly despises Swedish women and resorts to raping them, while his honour 'forces' him to batter his wife, sister or daughter as a means of social or domestic control. And all this is excused by his religion, the news texts explain (Brune, 2000).

This is actually a very damaging stereotype, which has become prevalent only in the last five years. It makes a mystifying and strongly degrading connection between personality, culture, religion and ethnicity, and functions as a model for explanation when men with some earlier connection to the Middle East are associated with crime. When men of Swedish origin commit the same kind of crimes, their actions are explained in terms of social or personal factors.

At this point it is extremely difficult to gauge the extent to which Swedish news journalism about immigration over the past five years has become more or less biased. In some areas it is clear that journalistic ideals have changed in a direction which might be harmful. For example, in crime reports, the mainstream press used to be quite strict about excluding details regarding an offender's ethnic or national origin unless it was relevant to the story. During the last ten years, however, this practise has changed. Now this information is often included, without any explanation regarding the pertinence of such details, except to underline distinctions of 'culture' or 'religion' in the ways mentioned earlier. Moreover, edi-

tors and journalists defend the practise in public debates, arguing that it is based upon attempts to be more 'European' and 'open' as well as less 'politically correct'. They also suggest that it reflects the expectations of their audience.

It is claimed that there also exists a positive tendency, often referred to by editors and journalists, to 'integrate' people with a foreign background in news reporting on different social matters. To judge from some earlier mentioned reports (Helenius, 1998; Johansson, Löfving and Vaagenes, 1998) a strong effort will be needed to create a breakthrough for this alleged 'tendency'.

4.14.2 NEWS MEDIA DEPICTIONS OF RACISM AND ANTI-RACISM

4.14.2.1 NEWS ABOUT RACISM AND ANTI-RACISM

How much attention do the news media pay to racist and anti-racist attitudes and activities in Sweden? According to various researches done in the last five years covering the 1990s, the news media have paid a lot of attention to racism and anti-racism, especially to violent actions by neo Nazi groups. But the attention is temporary and inconsequent.

A survey of news regarding racism, published in November and December 1997, garnered 500-600 press cuttings for each month, drawn from about 150 daily news media (nation-wide broadcast news, nation-wide daily newspapers and local daily newspapers), which averages four items per medium per month (Lodenijs, 1998). Lodenijs therefore concluded that there was hardly any continuous or systematic news coverage on xenophobic activities, racism, and discrimination in the daily news media.

Interestingly, the media's attention to some events and not to others cannot be explained in relation to the seriousness of the events, as defined by experts on racist violence. Rather, it seems to be a function of routine news telling, where news media cover events that other newsmedia have covered. This is typical for standard

news journalism, but also signals that the matters are not significant enough to require further investigation.

The single event to which media assigned highest news value during the period studied by Lodenius (November-December 1997), concerned a young man associated with a Nazi-inspired group who had been invited to give a lecture at Umeå University. This sparked a public discussion about the role of the universities and the limits of free speech, yet the media's interest was also fuelled by an alleged romance between the researcher who extended the invitation and the guest speaker.

Lodenius maintains that media may neglect larger neo-Nazi manifestations if they expect that conflicts will be absent. Furthermore, it seems important that the event takes place close to one of the three major cities, if it is to be reported by the national media. In 1997 a demonstration with a few hundred neo-Nazis in Stockholm marking the anniversary of the Crystal Night in 1938 Germany, resulted in relatively large media attention, probably because of the anti-Semitic position of the demonstrators. A more violent episode (celebrating the same anniversary) took place in a smaller city, and received hardly attention in local media.

Lodenius also points out that the news coverage of racist harassment and violence seems to be quite accidental. Serious instances of racism may escape the notice of the national media, while less serious events, which happen to have become medialised, may be covered for some period. The kind of racist or xenophobic crime, which gets the least attention in the news media, according to Lodenius, is discrimination in its different forms.

The numbers of news reports on racism and anti-racism are in general limited. But time and again there are periods with extensive reporting. In the study conducted by Löwander (1997) covering the first three years of the 1990s, news on racism and anti-racism more than doubled for some months, partly - but not mainly - as a consequence of an increase of acts of racial violence directed towards immigrants and refugees. Löwander observed that the news media totally marginalized the relative large number of appalling attacks

on immigrants and on refugee camps in Sweden, carried out by non-organized men with no previous convictions. At the same time the news media reported heavily on more spectacular cases of racist violence and neo-Nazi organisations. A raise of the reporting on racial violence in the news is normally accompanied by an increase in the reporting on anti-racism. Löwander discusses this phenomenon in the context of media's role to restore the national self-portrait of a tolerant and stable nation.

Löwander's main conclusion is that, for the news to be effective and credible, the news media follow, relatively uncritically, the conventions that they themselves have created. In the news reporting, racism is mainly understood as racial violence and anti-racism is reduced to protest against racial violence. Immigrants are assigned the role of victims of racial violence. The broadcasters are silent with regard to the relationship between racial hatred and refugee policy. And the whole field of research that in recent decades has debated the complexity of racism remains invisible.

4.14.2.2 DO AUTHORITIES AND JOURNALISTS RECOGNISE RACIST VIOLENCE?

Also for the period 1995-96, studies, revealed how journalists and authorities recognised and handled news on racist violence (Brune, 1996b; Lindquist, 1998; Rantakeisu, Almgren and Starrin, 1997). At the centre of these investigations was a violent incident targetted at a family in a village outside Karlstad, a medium-sized city in the heart of Sweden in 1995. This event seized extraordinarily high media interest, although, as an incidence of racist violence during the period it was far from exceptional.

The local and 'popular'¹¹⁹ media portrayed the victims as an immaculate, assimilated; model family¹²⁰ living in a typical Swedish villa in an ordinary Swedish village. They were suddenly attacked by

119 use the words 'popular' and 'serious/quality' for different types of news media in common usage. The difference between 'serious/quality' and 'popular' media has in my opinion nothing to do with their respective 'real' seriousness/quality or popularity, but with their style and appeal.

120 The parents immigrated to Sweden from Jordan some decades ago.

a racist mob comprised of about fifty young 'skinheads and others' who struck on Easter 1995. Armed with sticks and splitter bombs and shouting racist slogans, the mob injured both parents who had struggled to protect their children and property. Local and 'popular' media spontaneously sided with the family and described the events as an unexpected outburst of racism. The 'serious/quality' national media were more reluctant to define the matter as racism. They relied heavily on the police and other local authorities that soon stated that there were more complex causes to the 'trouble'.

The tabloid papers and popular news channels soon left the scene, after having constructed a fictitious peace between the perpetrators and the family. After a few weeks the local media had adopted the local authorities' assessment of the situation, one that was also backed by the Minister of Integration. In a personal article in Sweden's largest newspaper at the time, he urged the media not to provoke racism by defining personal conflicts as racist in nature. Six weeks later, the public prosecutor held a press conference where he stated that the attack upon the family had been neither planned nor motivated by racism. The media embraced this interpretation uncritically. By that time the attacked family's summer cottage had been burnt down. Two months later their Swedish model villa was set on fire and they finally had to leave the village. Rumours in the area, fuelled by insinuations in the news media, blamed the family for the 'trouble', and, more importantly, for the burning of their property.

In an ironic twist of events Mr. Hassan Labadi, the father of the family, was convicted of battery and fined in the aftermath of the Easter 1995 incident (incidentally, the only witnesses to testify in the case were either 'skinheads and others' involved in the attack or their friends). Mr. Labadi consequently had to sue his attackers for damages. Again, the local media reported the story at face value, without investigating further. In fact, the media's actions in this case were paradigmatic in several ways. Popular/tabloid and local media were the first to react to the family's persecution and to define it as racist.¹²¹ They expressed perplexity: how could this happen in our enlightened and tolerant society in the little idyllic village?

This reaction has been typical for news reporting on racist violence for some decades. The event was contrasted to an idealised conception of the nation, and the violence was represented as an incomprehensible outbreak of evil and primitive forces. To create a basis for identification with the victims, the family was described as an ideal average Swedish family (which might imply that the harassment and persecution would otherwise have been acceptable). The perpetrators, on the contrary, were initially demonised in the popular media and portrayed as thoroughly deviant, evil and frightening.

This construction was almost immediately attacked and criticised by representatives of the police and other local authorities, and soon after by the public prosecutor. These authorities pointed out that the perpetrators were common boys and that the family was 'different'. They also questioned the motive of racism because one of the leading young men had an 'immigrant background' insisting those involved lacked both the intellectual capacity and education necessary for initiation into racist ideology. The instigators were described as 'lost', looking for any affiliation that could give meaning to their lives. According to this reading, their racist attitudes should be interpreted as simply a passing whim. The boys were not racist by definition since they were ordinary, weak-willed and uneducated. The media, in its emotive condemnation of the village inhabitants, was then accused of exacerbating the situation, making it worse for the young kids in the village and paving the way for 'real' racism in the area. Interestingly, the news media to counter the accusations had no means, other than to discontinue coverage or echoing the view of the authorities.

Almost two years after the dramatic Easter events, an exhaustive report by three social researchers was published (Rantakeisu, Almgren and Starrin, 1997). Their findings clearly proved that the

121 Actually there was a wide range of explanations for the events that transpired, even by those who believed that the Labadi family were the victims of unprovoked aggression: 'racist harassment', 'violent racial antagonism', 'lynching', and 'mobbing' were all used to describe what happened. This terminological confusion indicates that contemporary racism in Sweden has hardly been analysed and debated. A little beside the confusion in common usage, it is not clear whether and how the discursive struggle on definitions of racism in the elite part of society affects the popular press and local news media. Quality media seem to adapt more keenly to official views.

family suffered persecution and harassment for several years leading up to the Easter attack and that it had been systematic, planned, and racist in character. Rantakeisu et al also discovered that at least twelve other immigrant families had been harassed by the same gang and were driven out of the village. The report also demonstrated that the possibility of racist motivations connected with the Easter attack was never investigated by the police. Moreover, the statements made by the judicial representatives, that no racism was involved, lacked empirical foundation, and could be interpreted as an effort to restore the reputation of the area.

The reason why these events are discussed in such a detail here, is that the reporting about them was thoroughly investigated and exemplified some typical deficiencies of news journalism in relation to racism and racist violence (Lindquist, 1998; Brune, 1998, 2000b). The shortcomings might be listed as:

- A narrative urge to portray the victim as absolutely 'normal', which means that neo-Nazi inspired violence against homosexuals, for example, has had little news value.
- An analogous inclination or narrative necessity to demonise the perpetrators, which creates the illusion that they are very different from other persons and exceptional in 'our enlightened and tolerant society.'
- An apparent lack of intellectual or personal understanding of how racism is expressed and formulated today.
- A blind confidence in the knowledge, impartiality, democratic and anti-racist attitudes among important authorities.
- An unwillingness or inability to conduct research that might challenge predominant views.

During 1999 and 2000, the news coverage about neo-Nazi-inspired activities in Sweden intensified after the murders of two police officers, and an anti-racist trade-unionist and two car bomb attacks against policemen and journalists respectively. On 30 November 1999, four leading newspapers jointly published an article about the neo-Nazi threat against democracy and the names and photos of the alleged most dangerous Nazi partisans in Sweden.

Afterwards there was more continuous coverage on extreme right-wing political activities¹²². However, news coverage on discrimination and xenophobic activities that cannot be linked directly to political groups continues to remain accidental and/or unassuming.

4.14.3 INITIATIVES TO PROMOTE CULTURAL DIVERSITY IN THE MEDIA AND TO IMPROVE NEWS REPORTING

There have probably been more initiatives taken during the period 1995-2000 than ever before in order to promote cultural diversity in the media and to improve the standard of news journalism in matters related to a multi-ethnic society.

4.14.3.1 EUROPEAN YEAR AGAINST RACISM

During 1997-1998 the Swedish Committee for the European Year Against Racism contributed to special courses in the journalism programmes at high schools and universities and to further training for practising journalists. The Committee also initiated a scholarship fund for journalists who wish to improve their knowledge, and deepen their understanding regarding the conditions of immigrants and minorities and of racism and xenophobia generally. An anthology of essays published with a grant from the Committee critically discusses news journalism and media practices in the field (Brune, 1998b). Finally, the Committee proposed that the Government, the Department for Integration, and the research councils should henceforth give priority to the improvement of education and research in the field (State Official report, 1998: 99).

4.14.3.2 MEDIA WATCHER QUICK RESPONSE

The informational project *Quick Response* started in 1998 by an initiative from the National Committee for the European Year against Racism and is a unit in the Swedish Red Cross Youth. *Quick Response* monitors the news media and responds, - by means of consulting a number of experts, - to erroneous or biased media

122 This judgement is supported by an unpublished overview, made by the organisation Quick Response (see 3.2), in which media coverage on racism 1999-2000 is described.

reports in questions involving immigration, integration, racism, and xenophobia. The organisation also provides journalists, students, and individuals with facts and background information on questions regarding multiculturalism in Sweden. The information is conveyed partly through lectures and conferences but primarily via its website¹²³. Articles and critical reactions to media coverage made by Quick Response reaches news agencies, news media and concerned members of the Parliament and the Government through a newsletter disseminated via email.

4.14.3.3 SWEDISH UNION OF JOURNALISTS

During 1997-1998, the Swedish Union of Journalists (SJF) prepared an action plan for 'Minority issues and the media' that was adopted in 1998. The plan stated that 'We must break off the traditional way to describe reality, where people are ranked after social and ethnic lines. Journalists have a responsibility not to /.../ create an "us and them-perspective" which heightens conflicts between people of different ethnic background'. Measures to improve knowledge and awareness among practising journalists were proposed, as well as measures to improve the recruitment of journalists with foreign backgrounds into the media industries (SJF, 1998). However, codes of conduct adopted earlier were judged appropriate by SJF and no special codes for reporting on 'racial' issues have been suggested. The rule deemed sufficient is : 'Do not bring out ethnicity , gender, nationality, profession, political affiliation or religion of the persons concerned, if it is unimportant to the situation and is disrespectful' (SJF, 1998). In reality, this rule was originally designed to protect the integrity of the individual, and not groups of people from being singled out in disrespectful ways. The *Pressens Opinionsnämnd*, which has the responsibility to ensure that the ethical codes of conduct be applied, has only objected to practises that have been harmful to individual integrity. SJF has also initiated the publishing of an anthology on journalism and minority issues (Harrie, 1999).

123 <http://www.quickresponse.nu>

4.14.3.4 INITIATIVES IN MEDIA ENTERPRISES

Several initiatives and projects have been launched in media organisations to promote cultural diversity at the work place. Most of the projects have started recently and it is too early to evaluate their impact. In the following a number of examples are given of what is happening at the present time. First, some companies, for example the Swedish Broadcasting Company (SR) and the newspaper *Dagens Nyheter*, have recruited previously unemployed persons with immigrant and/or journalist backgrounds, to give them an opportunity to work and further their education. These projects are for a limited time, however, and partly financed by the state as vocational training courses. Second, a few large circulation newspapers¹²⁴ are attempting to attract new audiences with special editions free of charge in specific areas. As a matter of fact, these issues seem to have achieved some popularity and credence among the settlers in those areas (Weibull and Warnebring, 1999). A third attempt is to make the ordinary publication of news and programmes more adaptable to a pluri-ethnic, multicultural society. In the Swedish Broadcasting Company, for example, reporters with a foreign accent are not only allowed but also encouraged nowadays. At *Göteborgs-Posten* this aim has resulted in a consultancy group made up of representatives from the largest minority groups, who are invited to discuss the contents of the paper with the editors once a month. Finally, within the Swedish Broadcasting Corporation, the Swedish Radio (SR) has adopted an active policy for increasing cultural diversity in programming and at work (recruitment plans), as well as anti-discrimination measures. It herewith follows the assignment stated in the Swedish government bill for 'A Radio and Television Serving the Public 1997-2001', to ensure that 'public service shall contribute to the process of integrating new migrants and members of minorities into the Swedish society and increase their possibilities to take part in the social and cultural debate'.

124 Göteborgs-Posten, Sydsvenska Dagbladet, Västmanlands Läns Tidning.

4.14.4 EDUCATION AND VOCATIONAL TRAINING

There are still no regular courses in schools of journalism and media training institutes with a view to developing a professionalism that is attentive to the involvement of the media in a pluri-ethnic and multicultural society. Such courses are only given sporadically, and with economic support from the State. The same conditions apply to further training possibilities for journalists. For immigrant journalists with earlier professional experience, there has been one vocational training course given at the Department for Journalism and Mass Communication at Göteborg University (JMG) during 1999, financed by the state.

4.14.5 CONCLUSION

The initiatives taken to create more multi-ethnic newsrooms and to recast Swedish journalism into an institution more attuned to the needs and perspectives of immigrants and minorities are either limited in time or are still in their infancy. Moreover, social structures that promote continued segregation in the hiring of journalists and traditional practises and values in Swedish newsrooms may be more intransigent than first imagined. While an assessment is necessarily impressionistic at this point, given the dearth of research on this topic, it appears that many of the positive initiatives taken thus far are not part of a long-term plan to challenge existing structures, and consequently may result in disappointment and passivity among those concerned.

It appears that a huge obstacle to overcome is a prevalent assumption that 'we' will learn certain things from 'them' that can enrich our already, almost perfect way of interpreting and representing reality. At times the end result reduces the goal of 'diversity' to superficial changes, such as hiring beautiful, exotic women to present the news in exactly the same ways as the established male Swedish news anchors. Likewise, the same assumption results in exoticising and condescending portrayals of immigrants in news making.

However, there also exists an interesting ideological counter strain, more observable in talk shows, show biz, movies and serials on television, than in mainstream media news output. It could be described as a vein of conscious global thinking/feeling/acting, which is critical to alleged Western supremacy and to many of the representations in mainstream media. Persons born in the 1970s and 1980s mainly promote this cosmopolitan attitude, and their different ethnic origins play well together with their anti-racist ideology. If their influence in the media increases, and there is reason to believe it will, it mean that issues concerning immigration, a multicultural society, racism and so forth will be discussed in a more explicitly ideological and polarised way, and this discursive struggle might also be able to challenge traditional news values.

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